DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 672 EC 305 716

AUTHOR Colley, Debra A.
TITLE Transition Systems Change: Lessons Learned in Continuing the Momentum and Evaluating Results.
INSTITUTION New York State Education Dept., Albany. Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities.
PUB DATE 97
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (75th, Salt Lake City, UT, April 9-13, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Disabilities; *Education Work Relationship; *Educational Assessment; Employment; Enrollment; High School Equivalency Programs; High Schools; *Outcomes of Education; Postsecondary Education; Special Education; Student Development; Surveys; *Transitional Programs; *Vocational Rehabilitation; Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *New York

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the results of an investigation that evaluated the outcomes of former students with disabilities who received special education transition services in New York State. The evaluation included a survey of 225 high school vocational rehabilitation case records and post-school interviews with 720 former special education students. The results of transition implementation were analyzed based on data from school exit information, postsecondary education participation, independent living services, and employment. The results found: (1) the number of students with disabilities enrolled in institutions of higher education increased by 45 percent from 1992 to 1996; (2) the number of students with disabilities enrolled in adult basic education and GED programs increased by 83 percent from 1990-91 through 1996-97; (3) the number of special education students participating in Tech Prep programs increased by 550 percent from 1993-94 through 1995-96; (4) 46 percent of the former special education students were working; (5) 17 percent of the students were attending postsecondary education programs; and (6) 78 percent were living at home. Results also indicate that compared to former students in general education, the youth with disabilities were working more, attending postsecondary education less, and seeking work to a greater extent. (CR)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 409 672



# Transition Systems Change:
# Lessons Learned In Continuing The Momentum and Evaluating Results

**Debra A. Colley, Ph.D.**

**New York State Education Department**

**Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities**

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Colley

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EC 305716

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

The states currently completing the fifth and final year of the Federally-sponsored Transition Systems Change Grants have identified key strategies that were effective during the five-year process. This article addresses the lessons that have been learned in terms of continuing the momentum for change in the area of transition services, and the role of evaluating results for youth with disabilities. These two components are interrelated as many states have found that the ability to demonstrate results (particularly in the areas of post-school success in employment and postsecondary education) leads to stakeholder involvement, support, and subsequent momentum to continue focusing initiatives on transition services.

**Transition Systems Change: Lessons Learned In Continuing**

**The Momentum and Evaluating Results**

The implementation of transition services serves the critical purpose of increasing the success of young people with disabilities in living, working and continuing their education in the community after completing their secondary education program. Accomplishing this purpose requires that fundamental changes be made to policy, expectations, and results.

The need to implement fundamental systems changes in the area of transition services has been documented through the State Systems Change Projects on Secondary and Transition Services (National Transition Network, 1996). These projects created a momentum for change. Beyond the five years of the systems change projects, however, the momentum for change and focus on evaluation of results for youth with disabilities must continue.

In many States, the driving force for change and increased results is tied to broader reform efforts in education and workforce development. Education and other human service and public policy areas, according to Gloeckler (1993), are being challenged by:

- the need to compete in a global economy;
- the pressure of the federal deficit (and the State and local deficit) and tax concerns of the business community and the middle class;
- the depressed revenue streams available to government to operate all of its programs and services;
- broad and profound change in the philosophical and societal context of serving people with disabilities;
- dramatically changing expectations of parents and consumers about what service systems will deliver for them.

Educators are accountable to a new standard for success. The standard is no longer that students complete school, but that they are prepared to be successful as productive and independent adults.

## Continuing the Momentum for Change

### National Lessons

Across the States who have completed their systems change projects on transition, key lessons that contribute to continuing the momentum for change have been discussed (National Transition Network, 1996). These States have learned that the following strategies are needed:

- Ownership at all levels. A "top-down", "bottom-up" approach ensures the involvement of people at all levels. Once this ownership is in place, momentum will continue.
- Leadership opportunities. Leaders and stakeholders need to be involved, promoting results for youth. Opportunities to involve leaders and stakeholders must be created at regional, State, and national levels.
- Common language and collaboration. Common language and definitions are necessary to engage new stakeholders, agencies, community programs, businesses, schools, and families in collaborative initiatives. The benefits of collaboration include reducing duplication and increasing efficiency.
- Focus on youth. For too long, States have focused on children, maybe even adults. Transition has given us the opportunity to put the needs of youth and secondary programs out in front. This focus on youth creates a new momentum, and one that will continue as youth transition into postsecondary and employment opportunities.
- Parent and student involvement. Parents and students must be partners in transition. When they are involved, parents and students often drive the momentum to change the system and increase results.
- Time and flexibility. Systems change takes time and requires flexibility in many ways. In order to continue the momentum for change, consideration must be given to these factors.
- Big picture. The big picture reminds us that transition services lead to improved results, as people with disabilities become successfully employed and independent in their lives. It is easy to become bogged down in the process, as opposed to creating momentum by looking at the big picture.

State Level Initiatives

In New York State, the momentum for systems change continues through a focus on results that is strategically tied to the mission and goals for programs and services. The New York State Education Department's Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) has the responsibility for both special education and vocational rehabilitation, assisting people with disabilities from early childhood through adulthood and into the workplace.

VESID has established as its mission that students with disabilities will complete school prepared to live independently, enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, pursue meaningful careers, and enjoy integration in the mainstream of American society. The vision for transition services is reflected by this mission and indicators of performance in transition areas are included across all the goals of the office. Examples of indicators that are included in VESID's strategic plan are to:

- increase percentage of youth receiving special education services who become employed, or who transition to college after completing high school;
- increase participation and performance of youth with disabilities in workforce preparation programs; and
- increase percentage of individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education programs.

Role of Evaluation

The key to evaluation is "results, results, results." The ability to demonstrate effectiveness of transition programs and services in terms of how young people are doing has never been more critical. New York State has instituted an evaluation approach that encompasses program reviews in both special education and vocational rehabilitation, and the collection of post-school data on youth with disabilities.

Program Reviews

School district special education program reviews are conducted through self-review procedures. School district teams are responsible for making determinations regarding both procedural compliance factors and other programmatic factors affecting results for students with disabilities. Each self-review addresses compliance with transition requirements, including the following components:

- The Programmatic Issues Section of the self-review requires districts to determine whether "IEPs are reflective of meaningful and comprehensive programs that focus on preparing students to leave school with the necessary skills for achieving appropriate levels of independent living and employability."
- Formal surveys of a random sampling of parents, administrators and staff in each self-review district include items related to transition. As an example, parents are asked to respond to the following statement, "If my child is 15 years old or older, plans for transition to post-school activities have been adequately developed and implemented as part of the IEP."
- Each district is asked to complete Individual Progress Tracking Sheets for a select number of students as part of the self-review. The items to be tracked for these students over a period of years include State test scores, attendance rate, subjects passed/failed, diploma status, percentage of day in general education and the provision of transition services (e.g., Occupational Education courses taken, participation in the community and at work sites).

The purpose of annually recording and reviewing this information is to focus attention on those factors which impact most significantly on student progress and preparation for postsecondary transition. The responses to these components of the self-review are analyzed and considered when developing Quality Improvement Plans for school districts.

Vocational rehabilitation programs are required to ensure that high quality, effective and appropriate services are provided consumers in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act, Federal and State regulations, and policies." To accomplish this, VESID conducts a statewide case review as a mechanism for evaluating how services are provided to consumers.

The statewide case review involves a review of randomly selected cases utilizing a standardized case review form. A report on the review findings is forwarded to the district office managers who are required to submit a Corrective Action Plan to address the noted recommendations. The office success in implementing the Corrective Action Plan is evaluated in subsequent case reviews. The data gathered in these comprehensive reviews allows VESID to address, correct and continue to measure and track service outcomes which ultimately lead to job placements.

Using the case review process, VESID initiated a specialty case review to provide baseline data on the implementation of transition services. During the review, 225 high school vocational rehabilitation case records were randomly selected for review utilizing the standardized case review form. The form consisted of questions from VESID's general case review, as well as additional questions that were specific to transition services.

The results of the case review indicated areas of effective implementation and areas in need of improvement. The case review system will continue to be used as a tool to assess the impact of these efforts in future years.

Post-School Results

The results of transition implementation are being analyzed based on data from school exit information, postsecondary education participation, independent living services, and employment. Evidence of improved results is exemplified by the following data (Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, 1997):

- The number of students with disabilities enrolled in institutions of higher education increased by 45 percent from the fall of 1992 to 1996.
- The number of students with disabilities enrolled in adult basic education and GED programs increased by 83 percent from 1990-91 through 1996-97.
- The number of special education students participating in Tech Prep programs increased by 550 percent from 1993-94 through 1995-96.

A pivotal strategy in the evaluation of transition services was to follow-up with students after they left school to determine post-school results. New York State does not have a mechanism to obtain information after students exit the school program. Because of this, VESID initiated a comprehensive project to interview former students, using the post-school indicators survey that was developed in Vermont. A pilot project was implemented to interview 114 former special education students in 1995, and replicated on a Statewide sample of former students (N=1,009) in the spring of 1996.

The purpose of the post-school interviews was twofold: (a) to obtain information on the results of students who received special education services after they left the secondary education system, and (b) to determine the critical programmatic indicators (including the effectiveness of transition planning) that led to student success. Information collected from students will guide

improvements in the educational planning process and assist in improving program results.

Interviews were conducted with 1,009 former secondary students (720 with disabilities and 289 without disabilities) who exited the secondary education program during the 1994-95 school year. The students were identified by 150 school districts which volunteered to participate in obtaining information from their former students. Student participants were from each of the eight transition coordination regions into which the State was divided for VESID's systems change initiatives in transition services. Students who were interviewed represented the various disabilities of special education students in the State, the full continuum of special education services, and all reasons for exit from secondary education (e.g., graduated with Regents, local, or IEP diploma; reached maximum age; dropped out).

The survey instrument that was used in each of the youth interviews contained questions related to post-school status, helpfulness of the school program, work experience, postsecondary education participation, community living, students who had dropped out of school, and transition planning. In addition to the interview questions, program information (i.e., class settings, related services, exit reasons) was documented for each respondent. The following highlights from the findings serve as examples of the types of results that have been obtained.

Among the 720 former special education students who were interviewed:

- 46 percent were working, most of whom had paid, competitive jobs;
- 17 percent were attending postsecondary education programs (vocational, technical, college or university program);
- the majority (78 percent) were living at home with their families.

Working Conditions. Among the respondents with disabilities who were working (n=334), the majority were working in paid, competitive jobs (89 percent). These individuals were most frequently:

- working full time (50 percent);
- earning above minimum wage salaries, between $4.25-$10.00 per hour (72 percent); and
- happy with their jobs (79 percent).

Although almost half of the respondents with jobs did receive fringe benefits (e.g., sick leave, vacation days), only 29 percent were receiving health insurance as one of their benefits.

College Majors. For the respondents with disabilities who were attending two and four year college programs (n=114), the most frequently identified majors were business administration (22 percent), arts and sciences (11 percent), undecided (6 percent), and allied health sciences (5 percent).

Comparison of Post-School Status with Former General Education Students. When the status of former students who received special education services and those who were in general education is compared, it becomes apparent that youth with disabilities are working more, attending postsecondary education less, and seeking work to a greater extent than their general education peers. Figure 1 depicts the comparison of youth with and without disabilities by post-school status.

---

Insert Figure 1 about here

---

Results of the post-school survey are being used to make policy changes and programmatic improvements.

## Conclusion

The implementation of transition services increases the success of young people with disabilities in living independently, working, and continuing their education. Accomplishing these post-school results requires that fundamental changes be made to policy, expectations and practices. The Systems Change Projects on Secondary and Transition Services created this momentum for change; a momentum that must continue as the need for results permeates all levels of service delivery. The lessons learned by States depict clear strategies to continue the momentum in preparing young people with disabilities for success in employment, postsecondary education and community living.

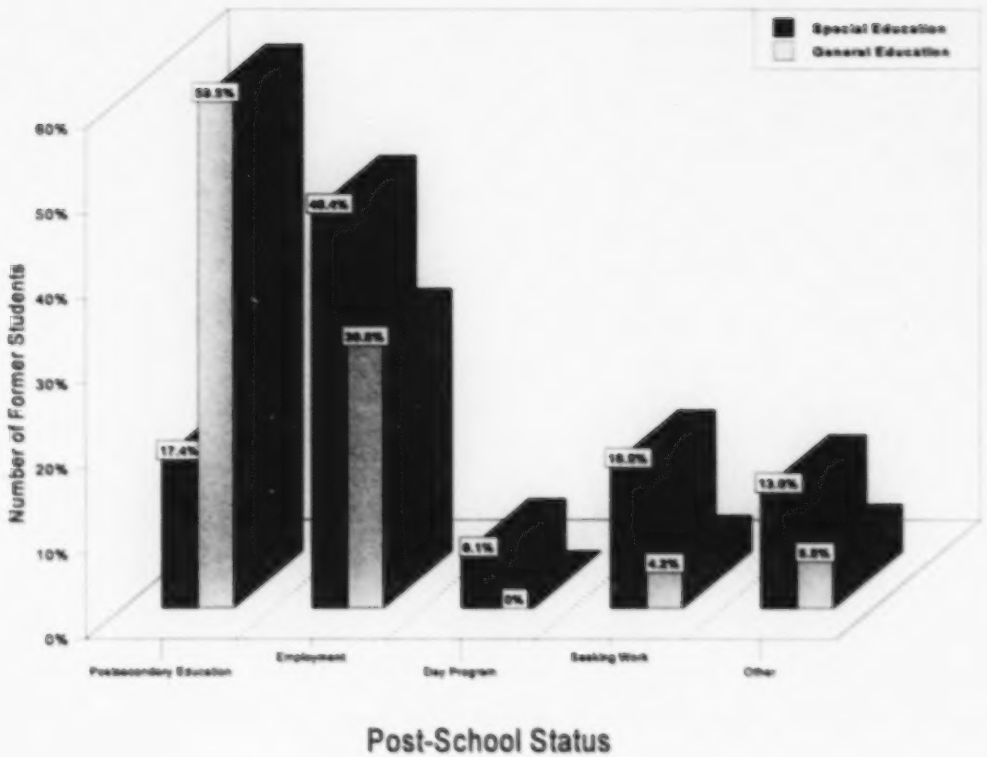
References

Gloeckler, L. (1993). Systems change and transition services. OSERS News In Print, VI (I), 6-12.

National Transition Network. (1995). State transition change projects are making an impact. Network News, 1-4.

National Transition Network. (1996). Lessons learned from state systems change projects. Unpublished manuscript, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities. (1997). Performance report of educational and vocational services for individuals with disabilities, 1995-1996. Albany, NY: New York State Education Department.


Special Education
General Education
Number of Former Students
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
17.4%
59.5%
48.4%
30.8%
0.1%
0%
16.0%
4.2%
13.6%
5.8%
Postsecondary Education
Employment
Day Program
Seeking Work
Other
Post-School Status

## Figure Caption

Figure 1. Post-school status of former students of special education (N=720) and general education (N=289).